FICTION BY THE BEST WRITERS

HOW FARRELL FOUND HIMSELF

By E. B. Waterworth

Sergeant Collins had leaped from behind the desk of the precinct station at the first shout which arose on the street. After years of service at the same station deep in the city's heart, he could always distinguish, even above the clatter and roar of traffic, that quality in a sudden uproar which indicated danger or a disturbance of the peace.

As he rushed to the door, with old Ben, the turnkey, pottering slowly in his wake he felt from sheer force of habit for his rear hip pocket to see that his revolver was handy in case it might be needed; and he swore vigorously to himself as it flashed across his mind that he had left it in the Lieutenant's locker—and that the Lieutenant was then out for lunch.

When he reached the door, after three hasty strides, he swore again and then uttered a warning yell to some children, who, bewildered by the cry arising up the street, were standing doubtfully in the gutter.

"Git in some store, there! Hurry, youse!"

In one glance he had grasped the situation. Half a block away, with head high lifted, tail lashing its flanks and stepping swiftly forward a few mincing steps at a time, was a steer—one of the swift, rangy animals which occasionally escaped from the shipping yards, a couple of blocks away, and had their last taste of wild freedom in the city streets. Sometimes these animals, frightened and blinded by the roar and changing view about them after their long journeys from the West, were easily rounded up and driven back by attachés of the yard. Sometimes they ran amuck in a wild fit of desperation induced by terror. And his first glance told the Sergeant that this steer was of the latter kind.

"He sure means trouble!" groaned the Sergeant, frantically glancing about the station to discover a weapon. "Got a gun, Ben?"

Without waiting for the old man's mumbled reply in the negative, the Sergeant snatched up a heavy nightstick, only to throw it down with a crash to pick up the rusty poker of the massive stove, which stood cold and dejected in the corner of the big, bare room throughout the summer. The poker was a huge affair, and, in case of necessity, he reflected, he could stun a steer with it. In the meantime, he fluently blamed himself for leaving his revolver in the locker. He had placed it there, after cleaning, to give a free dose of oil a chance to loosen the action which had become tightened with rust.

Ready as he was to do his duty, the Sergeant paused with a critical eye as he reached the open door. He was perfectly willing to attack the steer with his simple weapon if need arose for it. But he was also prepared to bide the arrival of aid if it could be done without danger to passersby. For he knew that to assail the huge brute, which stood pawing the street sweepings, piled in the gutter, all the while looking about in readiness for instant assault on any thing or person which seemed offensive, would be a desperate affair indeed.

Vigorous shouts from the Sergeant and Ben scared back two little girls who were about to cross the street. One man, issuing absent-mindedly from the swinging door of a saloon, glanced up just in time, upon hearing the chorus of yells from the heads which fringed all the windows in the block, to leap wildly back to his refuge. He dashed through the swinging door just as one thousand pounds of beef and bone hurtled in his direction. Had he been observant, like Sergeant Collins, he doubtless would have breathed thanks that his pursuer was of the long-horned variety of range cattle. One eager, searching horn barely reached his coat tails as he passed through the door. The other spreading out widely, caught on the door jamb and snapped off—but it stopped the rush, although the big brown and white body was whirled sideways by the force of its own impact, banging against the brick wall as the steer slipped on the sidewalk. The swinging doors, slamming on its nose at the same moment, evidently startled the animal, which backed off, snorted loudly and eyed the door menacingly from the gutter.

"If he's going to start chargin' around here," muttered the Sergeant, with a glance at the low store fronts on all sides, through which the refugees were peering, "it's goin' to be bad. Or if he goes after thim horses——"

He glanced to the next block where a long line of drays were drawn up, the horses placidly eating their noonday meal, while their drivers, hastily arisen from the shady side of the building where they had been eating their lunch, were watching the excitement on the block and keeping within safe distance of the factory doors.

"It'll be bad," the Sergeant repeated, as he took a fresh grip on the poker and started forth. Then he stopped with a sigh of relief. On the opposite corner, sprinting toward the steer with his revolver already in his hand, was young Policeman Farrell, just elevated to become a patrolman, after service as a probationary.

"Don't waste time! He's dangerous! Let him have it!" yelled the Sergeant.

Policeman Farrell turned a countenance toward him which was wreathed in a smile of joyous excitement. He waved a hand of recognition across the street and dropped to a brisk walk as he approached the steer.

"He goes at him quick enough," remarked the Sergeant, with a note of admiration in his voice; "but the boy oughtn't to go that close. He could drop that damned brute from where he is."

"He's made a good record in gun practice," mumbled old Ben; "maybe he's waitin'——"

But the Sergeant paid no attention to what the old man was saying. Without a pause, Farrell had kept on swiftly toward the steer, merely giving a peremptory shout which attracted its attention. Twenty yards from the steer, without slackening pace, he stepped into the street and

"HE SAYS, 'NO SOR,' SCARED LIKE"

still walked quickly toward it. The steer, recognizing another enemy, glared at him for one threatening second. The sight of its statue-like pose, of the rigid tail held out stiffly from the spine, of the strings of froth falling from the mouth, brought forth screams of terror for the officer from the women gathered at the second-story windows. Even the Sergeant yelled a caution down the block, although he realized it would be futile.

For just one instant the steer held its pose. Policeman Farrell was within twenty-five feet of him and suddenly halted, throwing up the arm in which he held his revolver. Even as he did so, the steer's head dropped for the charge, its tail rose high above its back and the muscles of its flanks tightened, as it prepared to plunge forward.

But the leap was never taken. Policeman Farrell had brought his revolver forward at the end of his extended arm in the manner of target shooting, taught him in the police gallery. The wild bellow which marked the steer's impulse to charge was mingled with the sharp crack of smokeless powder from the officer's .38. And with just enough force in its contracting muscles to hurl its huge bulk forward, a limp mass, upon its nose, the steer dropped, the bullet hole almost imperceptible in the long hair of its forehead. Then the prostrate bulk gave one moaning sigh, and, with a last stiffening of the mud-stained limbs, gasped out its life.

Hardly had the echo of the shot died away, when the carcass was surrounded by an eager crowd, the men explaining why they had run, and those attracted by the report from around corners demanding shrilly what had happened. The girls from the garment-working factories of the neighborhood swarmed out, in a delighted sense of half-terror, and looked admiringly at Policeman Farrell, who, perfectly unconcerned, but with a note of complacence in his voice, explained how he had first seen the steer when two blocks away.

"I saw him take a poke at you," he remarked as he slipped another cartridge into his revolver, nodding his head at the man who had been the steer's first object of attack, "and it's a good thing he wasn't one of those short-horned Herefords we've been having shipped here lately. He'd have gone through that door right after you, sure. His horn stopped him."

The man twirled his mustache in this reflected glory and commenced giving voluble descriptions of his experience. But Farrell seeing that two mounted emissaries from the stockyards were already on hand, turned and walked toward the station.

He made his report on the occurrence, smiling as the Sergeant complimented him. His superior officer even clumsily tried to explain his own nonappearance on the scene.

"It's perhaps a good thing," said Farrell, consolingly; "it would have been, perhaps, natural for you, if you'd had your gun, to fire at him when he charged that time. An' it's mighty hard to stop a big brute like that with a shot in the side. It might just have made him mad, and he might have gone off on a tear all through the district."

And the Sergeant, well pleased with this partial excuse for his not having his weapon always at hand as the rules required, merely got his revolver from the Lieutenant's locker at the earliest possible moment and turned in a commendatory report of Farrell's deed.

"It's glad I am to see this man has somethin' in him," mused Captain Hagerty that evening, as he read the report, the while passing a hand over his clean-shaven chin. "I was afeard of what he might do with that Connor gang up on the next block. But he's started off well."

In fact, when Farrell had first been assigned to his precinct two days before, Captain Hagerty had been sorely perplexed. Lying as his station did, in one of the roughest regions of the city, his officers at times were called upon to put forth their every ounce of physical and moral effort to handle some of the turbulent characters which infested the region. Like many another district of its sort, it was a hot-bed of politics. And diplomacy was required in handling some cases, even if these were clear infractions of the law. Farrell's readiness with a "gun," he fancied, might save him much trouble if he did not let his inclination run too far that way—if it did, the Captain reflected grimly, there was a certainty of trouble and plenty of it.

His belief that the episode in which the patrolman had just figured would help the officer's standing came partly true. The man who had been charged by the steer was a resident of the district and spoke highly of Farrell's rush into danger—his tale magnifying the event in all details so as to emphasize his own part and the coolness he had shown in escaping. By the time the tale had permeated the district, Farrell was a subject of much curiosity to the Connor gang, who made "Ben's Place" and "The Old '49" their headquarters. So on his first shift to a night beat, when the gentry who frequented those places were spending their hours of leisure consuming beer, Farrell found himself a center of interest and was asked to have a drink in several bars, besides being greeted in friendly fashion by numerous residents of his precinct.

"Whatever ye do," his captain had cautioned him, "don't go to drinkin' with any of thim loafers around here. There's a rule on the departmint that an officer mustn't inter a saloon excipt on duty. Ye can see it's a dead letter. But it'll be hard for ye if ye get in a row some time, in one of thim places. If ye want a sup of beer occasionally, take it when ye're off duty."

But a few days of watching told him that Farrell clearly was not obeying his mandate—or, rather, was not following his advice. The policeman was of a sociable disposition apparently, thought his chief disgustedly, but he refrained from speaking to him on the subject. Farrell never showed the effects of liquor, except in a slightly heightened color, always called up promptly and followed the routine of his station in methodical fashion. But he remained a good deal of a mystery to his commanding officers.

"Do you believe Farrell's stringin' in with that bunch on the next block?" Hagerty once demanded of Sergeant Collins in secret conclave. "It'll be a bad thing for him if he is. They've got too many black marks against them. Young Connor, one of that gang, is in the pen now. Yet here's Farrell comin' in night after night, without ever havin' trouble with thim."

The Sergeant shook his head in slow perplexity.

"He's a decent, well-spoken boy," he remarked in a worried tone; "but I can't size him up some way. I don't think he's stringin' in with that gang. But I mind a few nights ago—I was making the rounds on the upper end of the precinct—that I heard some of that bunch up at Grogan's makin' cracks about him as he walked past. He heard 'em all right. But he never batted an eye. You know how those fellows stand in with th' administration? Well, I'd told him not to beat any of them up if he ever made a pinch, just as a matter of policy. But I didn't tell him to stand for them abusin' him any. One of them chucked half a brick right near him—he threw it into a puddle Farrell was passin' and did it on purpose to splash the water over him. It splashed all over his trousers. Yet he made out he didn't notice and walked on."

"Yet I saw him takin' a drink with one of thim fellers, not long since," said the mystified captain, as he slammed down his desk. "There's somethin' I don't like about that man."

Even a faint whisper spreads—and oft times with considerable speed. It was not long before a hint or two that Farrell was letting himself be "bluffed" by the tougher element of the region began to percolate through the night squad. And this was made a certainty when, after walking in pairs on Saturday evenings as was the custom in the precinct on account of its turbulence on pay nights, Farrell's various companions had all brought back stories which, small enough in themselves, seemed to justify the whispered suspicion that he was "off color."

"Any man who would let them fellys on the north edge of the beat talk back to him needs to be taught somethin'," said a grizzled patrolman of long experience in the ward, as he conversed with a few fellow-officers. "Whin I wint past there with him last Saturday, he first suggested walkin' on the far side of the street. I told him I wanted to see who was in that gang on the corner. Whin we passed they commenced makin' remarks about brass buttons and solid bone heads. I turns quick enough an' grabs one of them, askin' if he means me. He says, 'No, sor,' scared like, for I was gettin' my night stick ready. I gives him a shake and asks if he means th' other officer. He hesitates a minute, so I shakes him and he says 'no' again. But there's Farrell—younger man than I am—stands there sayin' 'ah, come on.' Why, that's just encouragin' them guys. An' I didn't like the way he acted walkin' back down the beat."

"He's afraid, that's what he is," said a quiet voice from the rear of the room, where the wagon-man was smoking his pipe.

"Ah, come, Jim—don't say that—give him a chance—" burst from the others. For to accuse a policeman of being afraid was in the minds of every loyal officer at once the worst insult and the one which needed most proving in the entire category of accusations. Never in the history of their department had any man been summoned before the board on charges of cowardice in spite of numerous cases reported of neglect of duty. When a solitary case had been reported in another city, when, for the first time in that department's history an officer had had the buttons cut from his coat on a charge of cowardice, the members of the department had refrained from discussing the article and had all felt, indirectly, that this was a blot on the entire calling. So expostulation was general.

The wagon-man waited quietly until protests had died down.

"I know what I'm talking about," he said, confidently. "I was called out in a hurry up to the edge of the precinct last Saturday. The call from the box said things looked ugly. The captain ordered Farrell to go with the wagon. Now, you know what a quick trip of the wagon does in this district—it draws everybody outdoors. Halfway to the box Farrell claimed he had left his gun behind and got white in the face. When we got to the box we found Jerry Mandel, pinchin' a couple of those toughs that hang up around there. He was havin' his hands full and there must have been five hundred around that box watchin' the fight, all yellin'. Would you believe it? Farrell kept inside the wagon, askin' to have the prisoners passed in to him. He pretended not to understand and wouldn't budge when Mandel yelled to come down and help him. I had to jump down myself, and it's only luck that that green horse—the gray one—didn't get scared and run away."

"Maybe he ain't accustomed to handlin' a prisoner, yet," interposed one policeman.

"He's big enough; that's all I've got to say," responded Jim as he arose and walked back to the stables.

Not a man at the conclave repeated a word of the conversation. But little by little other anecdotes came in about Farrell, which made the captain stare at him doubtingly. Farrell always reported for duty neat and clean, complying to all the rules of departmental dress. Sometimes he came in with flushed face and disordered collar, and although the captain watched him earnestly for signs of liquor, he could not distinguish any symptoms of drinking.

"He must have been havin' some row," he murmured to himself. "Why doesn't he make a pinch, I wonder?"

So in the course of a few weeks Farrell commenced to have the reputation of an unreliable man. No cowardice charges were whispered, but it was clear that men on his beat did not wish to walk with him. And finally came the climax.

Farrell had been assigned to keep order at one of the boxing shows held by an athletic club in the neighborhood—a "club" which supported itself largely by holding ring bouts and by the proceeds of its bar. Partisanship shown by the referee had caused a surge toward the ring on the part of disgruntled spectators, one chair had already been thrown within the arena and affairs seemed ripe for a general outbreak when Sergeant Collins squeezed through the ropes, calling on Farrell to follow. This Farrell had not done, and the Sergeant strolling along the borders of the ring had contemptuously rapped with his heavy night stick the heads of a few hardy spirits, who were endeavoring to climb into the enclosure. One glance at Farrell's face in the crowd below made him turn away with contempt.

"It was rank violation of orders and the man was scared to death," he said that evening to the captain, as they sat in the latter's private office. "A prize fight crowd's the easiest in the world to handle—lots of noise and no danger. I jest didn't want anybody gettin' in the ring, where there was space enough for a scrap, so I called Farrell to follow. And his face went white as chalk and he was shakin' all over. He heard me all right. He jest didn't come."

And the captain, exasperated by other reports of the kind against Farrell, and rendered even more irritable by the policeman's weak defense of not having heard, ordered him to appear the next meeting before the police board. As the young officer left the room, with bowed head, Captain Hagerty hesitated a moment before making out his complaint.

"I've never accused another man of bein' a coward yet," he muttered to himself, as he ran his eye over Farrell's record, "but there's plenty of cases here that look bad. Still, I'll just put him down for neglect of duty."

Police Commissioners, well versed in their duties, can often read between the lines of a report made to them. And when they issued a summons for Farrell to appear, the president, an old man, long in office, gazed thoughtfully and rather sadly at the slip in his hand.

"It's the first case of the sort ever reported to me," he said slowly, "and I hope the officer can clear himself. I'm glad it's worded this way so the newspapers won't see anything in it. But we know what it means."

His colleagues nodded assent.

"I suppose he's that big young fellow sitting in the anteroom," remarked one of the commissioners; "he's large enough not to have any troubles of the sort. But what's that?"

The board, in its executive session, was occupying a room in the city hall, while their own rooms at police headquarters were being repaired. From the high windows of their room a shot rang out and a hoarse and threatening voice could be heard shouting angrily as they hurried to the windows.

On the wide lawn of the hall and almost below them stood a man brandishing a revolver and evidently crazed with drink. He was grinning and waving his arms wildly in triumph as he gesticulated at the figure of another man who was lying on the sidewalk, moving not at all. Across the lawn, coming toward him with the labored haste of age, was Patrolman McCarthy, the veteran guardian of the grounds about the hall. The old officer was clearly in distress from his hurry, but was fumbling under the tails of his coat as he ran, doggedly, toward the man with the weapon, who had dropped his gesticulation and stood gazing at him with head slightly forward, swaying slightly from the influence of liquor, but evidently keyed up to any frenzied deed, as could be seen from his attitude.

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"It's that mulatto, Rogers, just out of the penitentiary," remarked the president of the board, as calmly as though another tragedy was not impending; "he was sent up for homicide—now he's out and crazed with drink again." There was no time to say more. The mulatto had drawn himself erect and was slowly raising his arm to aim at McCarthy, who, still tugging to get his refractory weapon from his pocket, was panting gamely across the lawn.

"Poor Mac!" said the president under his breath and started to turn away his head—for he had known the veteran officer for years and could not bear to see what was coming. Then he suddenly whirled to the window again at the vice-president's cry:

"Look! Look!" shouted that official.

Out of the door of the hall beneath them darted Farrell, whose leap down the stairs from the anteroom had detained him but a few seconds. In his hand he held a revolver—a lengthy, heavy police weapon, which he handled with accustomed air. Almost unconsciously, the commissioners glanced at the mulatto, who had turned at the sound of the door slamming, and whose baleful face, as he glared at Farrell, made them shiver with its intensity of insane ferocity—then they turned toward Farrell who had leaped lightly out on the lawn and quickly, almost blithely, was approaching the man. Through the windows they could even catch the officer's clear laugh of contempt.

"Put down that gun, you d—d nigger, or I'll send you where you belong!" he shouted in a sneeringly peremptory tone. "Drop it, I say! If that gun ain't on the lawn when I reach that walk you get what's comin' to you!"

Under the commanding tones the mulatto had hesitated for a moment—then he raised his weapon with a glare of hate in his eye and leveled it at Farrell. And at the same instant Farrell leaped boldly forward on to the walk he had defined as a boundary and threw up his own revolver with a rapid, snake-like gesture—but before he could press the trigger, the mulatto, succumbing under the cold gleam of the eye which shone down the barrel, had dropped his weapon and cringed shivering with fright, his hands in the air, a pitiable shred of the dangerous murderer who had stood there but a moment before.

Lowering his arm with the revolver, but keeping the cocked weapon by his side, the policeman walked quickly up to his prisoner, kicking the fallen weapon far across the lawn, and ran a practiced hand over his clothes.

"He don't seem to be armed, Mac," he said, as the older man hastened up; "you might lead him to the box. Oh," he added, as the mulatto, through nervous tension or else because of the fumes of the drink reasserting themselves, made a plunge backward, "the gent seems to prefer to ride." And, lowering the hammer of his own revolver with the hand that clutched the weapon, he sent a smash across the man's forehead that stretched him senseless on the lawn.

"You'll have to call an ambulance for this man he shot, anyway," remarked Policeman Farrell cheerfully to McCarthy; "but you won't find him badly hurt. I saw a piece of his coat fly up when the nigger fired and I think the bullet must just have grazed his right shoulder."

Then, without waiting for the approach of the morbid throng which was pouring to the scene, and in which he saw several officers who would assist McCarthy, he turned to his session before the police board.

It was a quiet meeting, that executive session. The veteran president colored as he read some of the charges, which bore a double meaning to the officer's ears. And the policeman, sitting silent, also colored. For although cowardice was not charged it was implied.

There was silence for a moment as the president concluded. Then he arose.

"Officer," he said, as he tore the charges into slips, "my colleague and I have had a few minutes of discussion before we called you in after witnessing your work. In view of your recent performance, we not only dismiss these charges, but will see if there is any ground for malice behind them—well?"

Patrolman Farrell had risen to his feet and in a husky voice that could scarcely be heard had raised his hand in interruption.

"Those charges ain't malicious, gentlemen—they're true," he whispered.

For several moments nothing could be heard in the board room save the heavy breathing of the patrolman. Once he raised an anguished face and moaned:

"Gentlemen—if you'll give me a moment—if you'll give me a chance to do what's right!"

Again there was silence. Not a member of the board stirred as the big policeman pressed his hands against his face in a strong effort to control his emotions. Then, with a gulping sound, Farrell straightened himself and commenced to speak in a hard, expressionless voice.

"It's the truth, gentlemen; I'm a coward. I've tried not to show it, but I've done it. I've always been that way. When I was a boy, I had a stepfather—he used to come home drunk and beat me—beat me 'til the doctor said my nervous system was shattered. At school, I was bigger than most boys of my age—an' stronger. Yet smaller boys could lick me. Somethin' seemed to turn to water in me, when I went to fight back. I would lose my strength. In all my fights, gentlemen I was licked. I grew up that way—and you don't know what it means to a boy, year after year. I lost confidence in myself—couldn't do anything as well as the rest. An' it's told on me, it's told on me!

"I learned how to use a revolver—the drill sergeant can show you my record. When my mother and I moved here, I thought I'd leave all the old life behind me. It didn't take any bravery in me to kill that steer you read about just now! I can shoot, so he never had a chance. I could have dropped that drunken nigger out there before he ever raised a gun. That wasn't bravery. Yet I let those fellows up in my precinct bluff me, because I couldn't use a revolver in a little scrap like that—an' if I'd fought them I'd have been licked, strong as I am. It's the old yellow streak, comin' back. Them charges are right, gentlemen I'm a coward."

The officer buried his face in his hands again. For an instant no one spoke. Then the president arose softly, and put his hand on the policeman's shoulder.

"No man whose nervous system has been shattered can say he has a yellow streak, after the way you've acted, Farrell," he said, slowly. "You've simply been at a disadvantage all your life and don't realize now that you are on an even footing with any adversary. You have the law behind you as well. You are not a coward, either. It took moral courage to tell us what you've just done, and we need moral courage in this department, just as we need the physical kind of bravery. You haven't found yourself, that's all.

"Now, listen. The charges are dismissed. I will see you are made a desk man until you appreciate what I say—that confidence in yourself is what you want and that you will be supported when you do your duty. Do you want to try this new run?"

Policeman Farrell lifted his head and his eyes were wet.

"I'd like to, sir," he said simply; "and I hope, God willin', that if I come before ye again, it won't be as Farrell, the coward."

It was at the next quarterly meeting of the board that the president, with a grim chuckle, read the account of a capture of two armed Italians, badly wanted as witnesses in a "black hand" case, by a policeman who had knocked them down with his night stick and had dragged them to a patrol box through a shrieking mob of the prisoners' friends, who had been deterred by the officer's demeanor from trying to rescue his captives.

"The officer's name is Farrell," remarked the president slowly. "I rather think, gentlemen, that the young man has found himself."